

Statement

Regarding the Issue of Content Restrictions and Distribution Suspension on Game Distribution Platforms

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Association for Freedom of Entertainment Expression (AFEE)

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I. Summary of the Statement

We, AFEE, are an organization that has been active since 2013 with the aim of respecting diverse forms of expression in entertainment and protecting consumer interests. In conjunction with events like Comiket, we conduct advocacy campaigns and host discussions and study sessions about freedom of expression.

Recently, incidents have been reported on game distribution platforms such as Steam and itch.io, where many games, including adult games, have been subjected to distribution suspensions or delistings due to pressure from human rights organizations or payment processing companies. (For background details, see below.) We would like to express our stance below in order to protect creators' freedom to create and users' freedom to choose.

2. AFEE's Concerns and Requests to Distribution Platforms

1. Respect for Rating and Zoning Systems

Steam and itch.io have established systems such as age verification and filtering to allow users to safely select content. By clearly zoning adult content and establishing safe distribution mechanisms, they have supported both user choice and creators' freedom of expression.

We express our appreciation and respect for the efforts made by these platforms in establishing such regulatory systems.

2. Support for Stance Not Yielding to Unjust Pressure

When human rights groups and payment processors exert ideologically motivated or moralistic pressure, it is extremely important for Steam and itch.io to continue their efforts to protect content and uphold cultural diversity.

Arbitrarily delisting or hiding legal content simply because it is controversial is a form of censorship. We strongly hope that platforms will make careful and rational decisions without giving in to unjustified external pressure.

3. Request to Avoid Suspending Legal Content

Suspending legal content harms both creators and users.

It creates not only business risks for creators, but also a chilling effect that discourages creative expression out of fear of arbitrary removal.

When platforms remove diverse content, users lose opportunities to freely access it. We strongly urge platforms to prioritize dialogue with users and maintain content policies that avoid inappropriate censorship.

4. Request for Flexible Zoning by Region

To respect the laws and cultures of each country or region, we request that platforms implement flexible systems—such as regional age gates and settings—that allow users worldwide to access content legally and appropriately based on local standards.

5. Consideration for the Rights of Creators and Users

Games are rich cultural expressions born from creators' passions.

It is essential that creators have the right to freely choose themes, and users have the right to independently select and enjoy content.

We express our gratitude to platforms for continuing to respect these rights and hope for their ongoing support.

3. Conclusion and Encouragement to Platforms

We at AFEE commend platforms such as Steam and itch.io for protecting diverse forms of expression and maintaining zoning systems while providing users worldwide with freedom of choice.

We sincerely request that platforms continue to reject unjustified pressure based on ideology or morality, and uphold the freedom of creative expression and user enjoyment.

We encourage platforms to continue striving to provide diverse content to consumers and support their ongoing efforts from the bottom of our hearts.

Background and Issues

1. In July 2025, Steam and itch.io suddenly suspended or delisted some adult (NSFW) games without notice. This is reported to be due to pressure from anti-porn organizations such as Australia's "Collective Shout", which is backed by payment processors like Visa, Mastercard, and PayPal.
2. On itch.io, all NSFW-tagged content was removed from search results and browsing pages, resulting in over 20,000 titles becoming effectively invisible. This "stealth delisting" was carried out without prior notice, causing significant confusion.
3. Steam revised its Steamworks guidelines, prohibiting content that it judged as violating payment processors' policies, and mass-deleted relevant adult content.
4. As a result, many reports have surfaced of content with high cultural value—such as works involving LGBTQ+ themes, mental health, or domestic violence—being affected. This has sparked concerns about a new wave of restrictions on freedom of expression.
5. Communities of gamers and creators have launched organized petitions and protests on platforms like Reddit, Bluesky, and Change.org. Over 170,000 signatures have been submitted to Visa and Mastercard, along with mass protest emails and calls.